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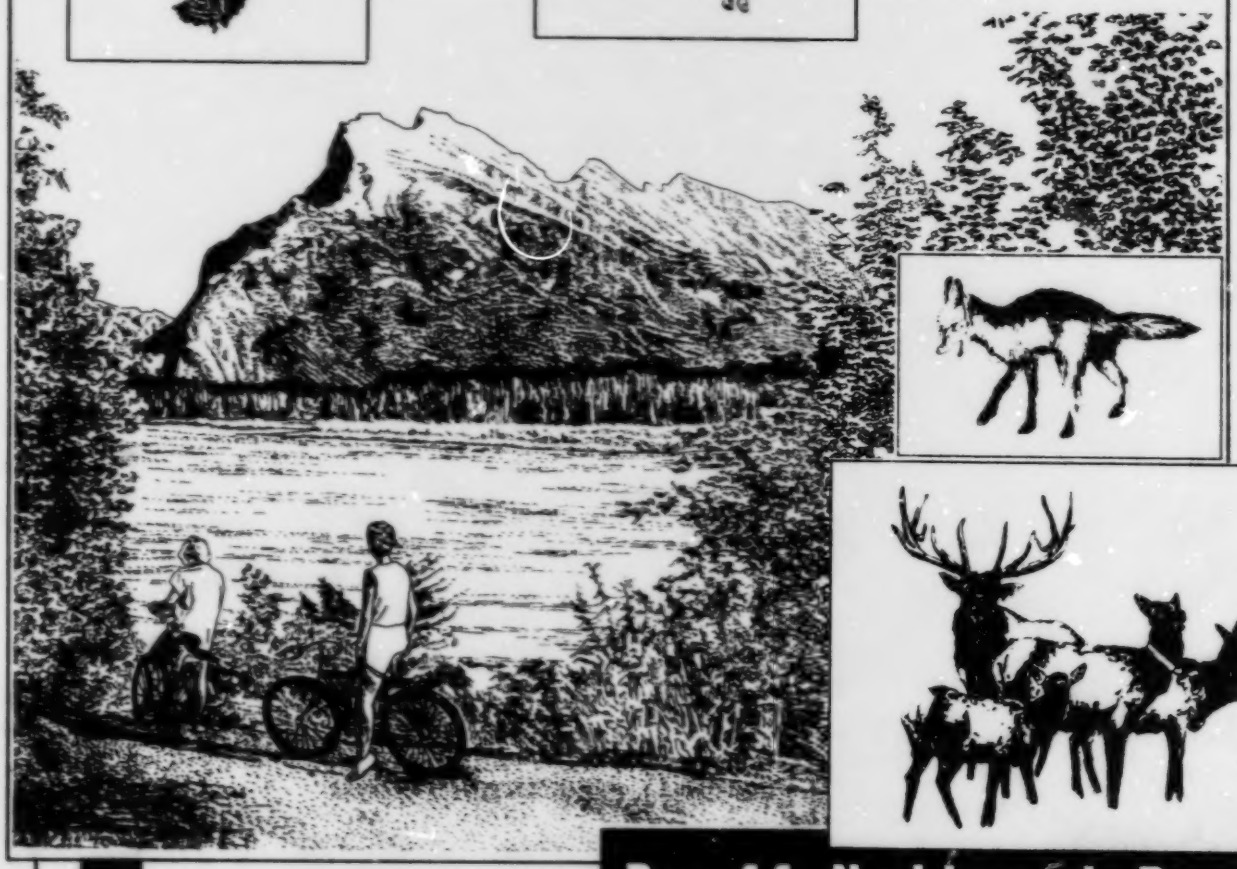
Vermilion Lakes

AREA PLAN



Banff National Park

April 1980

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APPROVALS
VERMILION LAKES AREA PLAN

Approved by:

April 10, 1990.

Dave Day
Superintendent
Banff National Park

Date

April 18/90

Sandra B.M. Davis
Director General
Western Region

Date

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Vermilion Lakes, with Mount Rundle in the background, is probably one of the most commonly photographed and painted scenes in the Canadian Rockies. The proximity of the lakes and associated wetlands to the Town of Banff and the Trans-Canada Highway has made them one of Banff's most recognized natural areas. The Vermilion Lakes wetlands complex provides a startling contrast to the surrounding mountainous terrain that makes up most of Banff National Park.

The lakes, which are subject to water level fluctuations throughout the year, are a treasured recreation area, for town residents and park visitors alike. Jogging, bicycling, walking, nature observation and relaxation are favourite activities. When lake levels are high enough, the Vermilion Lakes are also used for canoeing, fishing and boardsailing. Popular activities among park visitors are scenic drives, wildlife viewing and bicycling along Vermilion Lakes Drive. An average of about 350 vehicles drive theVermilion Lakes Drive each day in the summer, along with an average of about 200 bicyclists each day. Many others arrive on foot from the Town of Banff.

The Vermilion Lakes area contains an exceptionally high concentration of special biological, physical and cultural resources which are deemed to be worthy of a high degree of protection. The lakes are located in the Montane Ecoregion of the Bow Valley, which is limited in extent and noted for special protection efforts in the Banff Park Management Plan. More specifically, the area contains:

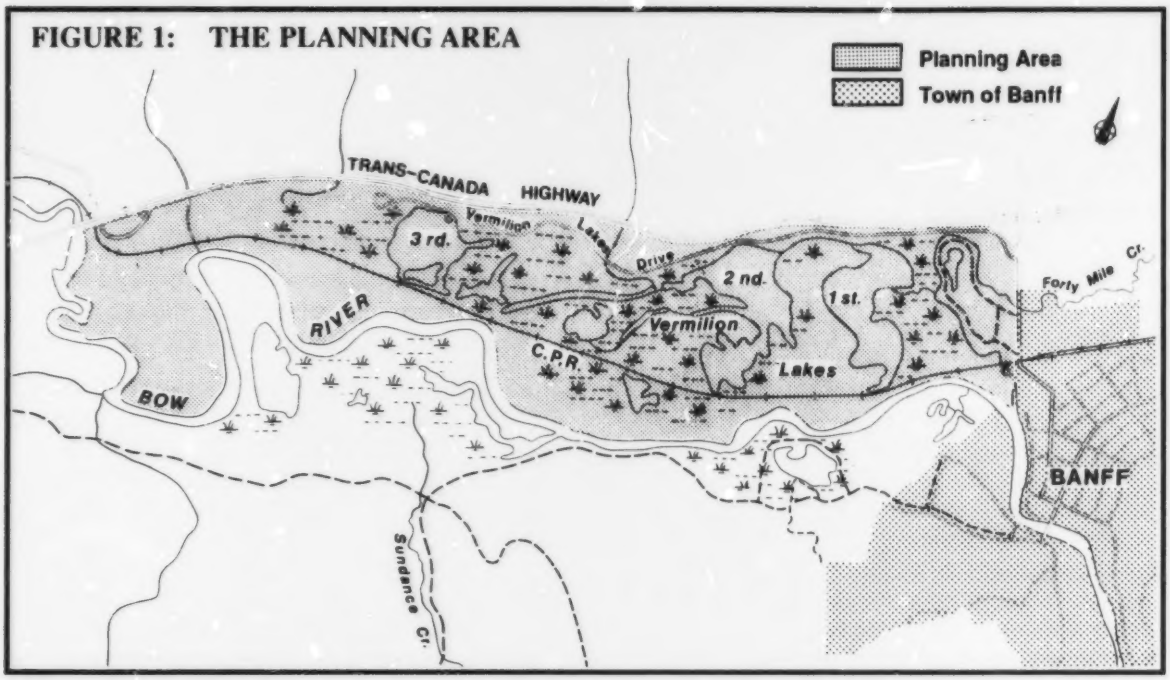
- a wide diversity of vegetation types and a disproportionately high number of rare or significant plant species;
- some of the most productive avifauna breeding, staging, migration and winter habitat in the park;
- important habitat for a wide variety of mammals, including ungulates, carnivores, beaver, muskrat and river otter.
- a concentration of important prehistoric cultural resources associated with native occupations dating back to around 10,500 B.P.

The location of these ecologically and culturally significant wetlands adjacent to the most developed and heavily used part of Banff National Park makes protection efforts particularly challenging and critical. It should be noted that the area is not untouched - there has been considerable disturbance and manipulation of wetland resources for over a hundred years. Major impacts include the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, Trans-Canada Highway and Vermilion Lakes Drive, the introduction of exotic fish species, livestock grazing and chemical spraying for mosquito control. The fact that the resources and ecological integrity remains largely intact attests to the remarkable resilience of this natural area.

A considerable amount of direction for the management of the Vermilion Lakes is provided in the Banff Park Management Plan, including the direction to develop this Area Plan. There has been pressure from some members of the public to artificially maintain water levels in the lakes to enhance recreational opportunities (notably canoeing, fishing and boardsailing) and for aesthetic reasons. Consistent with the results of special studies, the Banff Park Management Plan confirms that natural water regimes will prevail in the Vermilion Lakes. Recreational use will be secondary to protection objectives in this highly significant ecosystem.

The area is designated an Environmentally Sensitive Site in the Park Management Plan. This designation is applied to areas containing significant and sensitive heritage resources which require special protection. Unlike Zone I areas, Environmentally Sensitive Sites can accommodate higher levels of controlled visitor activity without jeopardizing heritage resource values.

FIGURE 1: THE PLANNING AREA



Extending the Vermilion Lakes Drive to connect with the Bow Valley Parkway for motor vehicle traffic was considered and rejected due to public opposition during the management planning program. A bicycle path connection with the Bow Valley Parkway is considered feasible, however. Other issues addressed in this Area Plan are defining the visitor experience to be provided, direction for resource management, the appropriate type and level of recreational activities and the improvement of communication services in the area. The Park Management Plan precludes commercial development in the Vermilion Lakes area.

This Area Plan was developed in concert with an area plan for another important wetland area in the Banff townsite region - the Cave and Basin Wetlands (Figure 1). The two plans should be considered together, since there are a number of common objectives and plan proposals stemming from the shared resource management and visitor use considerations.

2.0 AREA ROLE & MARKET POSITION

The Vermilion Lakes area is an easily accessible area where town residents and park visitors can experience and learn about significant natural and cultural resources. The area's resources remain in a largely undisturbed state, despite frequent past disturbances by humans. Protection of these resources and the processes that shape them is a priority, in accordance with the area's status as an Environmentally Sensitive Site.

The area provides a comfortable transition between the town's urban environment and the park's backcountry. It offers a haven from the bustle of the nearby town and Trans-Canada Highway, for the quiet pursuit of a wide range of leisure activities.

3.0 OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

3.1 Resource Protection and Management

OBJECTIVES

To allow natural processes to continue without interference, except to offset human influence or to protect unique resources or major man-made facilities.

To encourage research into the area's natural resources and ecology in order to apply well-informed resource protection and management actions.

Actions

- A return to as natural a hydrological regime as possible will be pursued, given that the C.P.R. mainline and Vermilion Lakes Drive will remain and continue to affect natural water flows.
- Research will be carried out to more comprehensively define the natural ecology of the area, and appropriate resource management actions. A study will be undertaken to:
  a) assimilate available information on the area's ecology from an historical perspective;
  b) assess the current status of the area's resources and ecological processes; and
  c) recommend appropriate resource management actions to support area objectives.
- The requirements for a study of the ecology of the Vermilon Lakes will be reflected in the Park Conservation Plan.
- In the interim, actions affecting water levels will be taken only to protect built facilities during flood conditions.
- Ecological indicators such as wildlife populations and vegetation succession will be closely monitored.
- Discussions will be held with C.P. Rail to return the flow of water between the Bow River and Vermilion Lakes to a more natural state, should twinning of this portion of the mainline become a reality
- Proposed visitor facility development will be carried out in a manner which does not significantly interfere with natural processes.
- Fisheries management will be addressed in the park's Fisheries Management Plan.

Discussion

Man-made dams have kept water levels at an artificially high level from 1950 to the recent past. The implications of the decision to return to a more natural hydrological regime require further study, although sufficient information is available to support the direction provided in the Park Management Plan and this Area Plan. Additional information is needed to guide specific resource management actions and enhance interpretation messages.

OBJECTIVE

To minimize impacts to archaeological resources as a result of facility development.

Actions

- Knowledgeable archaeologists will be involved in the design of area facilities, so that impacts to resources are minimized through proper route and site selection.
- A salvage archaeology program will be carried out in conjunction with the upgrading of visitor facilities along Vermilion Lakes Drive and with the development of a bicycle path connecting Vermilion Lakes Drive and the Bow Valley Parkway (see Section 3.3 - Visitor Facilities).

Discussion

There is a concentration of important archaeological sites in the Vermilion Lakes area. Current facilities such as the Trans-Canada Highway and Vermilion Lakes Drive have disturbed archaeological resources to an unknown extent, and any new development will likely have some impact as well. It is important that archaeologists have an opportunity to participate in the site planning for visitor facilities. Impacts can then be avoided through appropriate site or route selection, or sites can be thoroughly inventoried and studied prior to development activities. This is particularly important along Vermilion Lakes Drive and the area west of the road, where there are high concentrations of archaeological resources.

OBJECTIVE

To interpret the natural resources, ecology and archaeology of the Vermilion Lakes area to visitors.

Action

- Messages which interpret the ecology and archaeology of the Vermilion Lakes area will be an important part of the communication services described in Section 3.4 - Communication Services.

Discussion

Understanding of the park's heritage resources, the processes that affect them and necessary resource management actions serves to enhance support for protection efforts. The special natural and cultural resources of the Vermilion Lakes wetlands are important within the context of Banff National Park and are worthy of enhanced presentation to the public (see also Section 3.4 - Communication Services).

OBJECTIVE

To actively encourage adequate revegetation of the slopes disturbed during Trans-Canada Highway reconstruction.

Discussion

The steepness and lack of topsoil on slopes adjacent to the Trans-Canada Highway make revegetation extremely difficult. Continued efforts are warranted due to the importance of these slopes to wildlife, and for aesthetic purposes.

OBJECTIVE

To protect the scenic vista of the Vermilion Lakes wetlands so that it retains its natural appearance.

Action

- All facility development will be low-key and visually unobtrusive (see also Section 3.3 - Visitor Facilities).

Discussion

The visual quality of the Vermilion Lakes area and peoples' perceptions of it as a well managed natural area are important. Due to the open nature of the wetlands, this perception can be adversely affected by man-made facilities.

OBJECTIVE

To ensure that the disturbance of wildlife, particularly during critical nesting and calving periods, is kept to a minimum.

Action

- Actions may be necessary to restrict some visitor use on a short-term basis for resource protection purposes.

Discussion

Short-term closures of specific areas may be necessary to protect wildlife. Every effort will be made to locate facilities where wildlife will not be affected so as to minimize the requirement for these closures.

OBJECTIVE

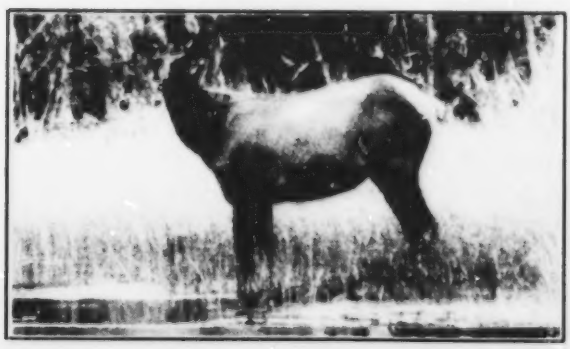
To conduct a review of Zone I areas in the vicinity in light of new information on archaeological resources.

Action

- New information will be considered and consistent criteria will be applied to this review, in time for the 5-year review of the Banff Park Management Plan.

Discussion

New information concerning archaeological resources warrants a review of Zone 1 areas. Any recommended changes will be subject to public review, as part of the five-year review of the Banff Park Management Plan.



3.2 Recreational Activities

OBJECTIVE

To support activities which:

a) Are consistent with the area's role and market position;

b) Do not cause unacceptable environmental impacts;

c) Do not result in conflicts with other users;

d) Do not require an on-site commercial base; and

e) Encourage first-hand experience of the area's heritage resources.

Discussion

There are few problems associated with the recreational activities currently carried out in the Vermilion Lakes area. Use will be monitored and necessary management actions taken should resource impairment or visitor conflicts occur. The above guidelines will be used to assess the appropriateness of new recreational activities.

OBJECTIVE

To maintain low levels of vehicular traffic on the Vermilion Lakes Drive and actively encourage non-motorized use of the area.

Actions

- Bicycle and pedestrian linkages with the Town of Banff will be improved. A trailhead/parking area will be developed along the Bow River pathway in town. A trail will be provided to clearly link the Bow River Pathway to the Fenland Trail (see also Section 3.3 - Visitor Facilities).
- Orientation for bicyclists and pedestrians originating in the town will be improved (see also Section 3.4 - Communications Services).
- Necessary improvements will be made to the Vermilion Lakes Drive roadbed, while maintaining the present width and rough chip-seal surface.

- Active marketing/promotion of the Vermilion Lakes as a townsite area pedestrian and bicyclist destination will be increased. The "Drives and Hikes" brochure will be revised to emphasize this type of use in the Vermilion Lakes area. Promotion of motorized access will not be increased.
- Large buses and recreational vehicles will not be permitted to use the road. Signs will be posted to this effect.
- A speed limit of 40 km per hour will be posted.

Discussion

A commonly asked question at the Banff Information Centre is "What can I do near the town?". Although there are several opportunities (Vermilion Lakes, Cave and Basin area, Tunnel Mountain), they are not connected to the town by clearly marked pathways. Minor improvements to parking, orientation signs and linkages between existing trail systems are all that is required to greatly improve the situation. With approximately 10,000 town residents and approximately 3.5 million visitors coming to the town each year, the potential market for this area is tremendous.

Attempting to make the road increasingly accessible to both motor vehicle and pedestrian traffic would only create an unsatisfactory situation for all concerned. The decision to favour bicyclists and pedestrians over motor vehicles is based on the ability of these groups to better enjoy and appreciate the special resources of the Vermilion Lakes, as well as the multitude of opportunities for motorists elsewhere in the park and the townsite region.

The narrow road width and lack of space for an adequate turnaround currently make the Vermilion Lakes Drive unsuitable for large vehicles such as tour buses and large motor homes. There are also conflicts between the emphasis placed on encouraging pedestrians and bicyclists, and developing facilities for large vehicles. The narrow road width makes competition between the two user groups a hazardous prospect. In addition, opportunities to experience the area's natural environment can be adversely affected by the diesel fumes and noise from these large vehicles. Superior driving experiences for large vehicles can be found on a number of other park roads.

OBJECTIVE

To encourage visitors to leave their vehicles for short time periods and experience the area's media and heritage resources first-hand.

Actions

- This objective will be met through several small-scale pull-outs within viewing distance of points of interest, as well as roadside interpretation media, short walking trails, boardwalks and easily accessible viewpoints (see also Section 3.3 - Visitor Facilities and Section 3.4 - Communication Services).
- Minimal services will be available for visitors who stay in their vehicles.

OBJECTIVE

To provide opportunities for year-round use.

Actions

- The road will continue to be plowed to facilitate winter recreational activities including jogging, scenic driving, nature observation and skating.
- Seasonally relevant communications media will be provided (see also Section 3.4 - Communication Services)

Discussion

Vermilion Lakes Drive is one of the few places in Banff National Park which is accessible to pedestrians and motorists in the winter. Its proximity to the Town of Banff, its residents and visitors, make this accessibility even more appreciated. Cross-country skiing opportunities in the area are poor, while spectacular scenic viewing and nature observation opportunities abound. Current winter average daily vehicular traffic is 70 vehicles per day (1987 figures) and joggers frequent the road throughout the year.

3.3 Visitor Facilities

OBJECTIVE

To improve pedestrian and bicyclist linkages with the Town of Banff.

Actions

- Orientation to the Fenland Trail/Vermilion Lakes area will be included at a parking/staging area on Bow Avenue.
- A pathway will be developed to clearly link the Bow River pathway to the beginning of the Fenland trail. The current maze of random paths will be replaced by a well-defined route.
- Orientation signs will be added to all trailheads and junctions so visitors can more easily and safely travel from the Town of Banff to the Vermilion Lakes (see Section 3.4 - Communication Services).
- The connection between the Fenland trail and Vermilion Lakes Drive will be realigned so that it is less steep and stays off the road for as long as possible.

Discussion

Although informal trail connections between the town and the Vermilion Lakes have existed for some time, they are known only to town residents. Visitors find the trail linkages confusing. The maze of trails also causes more environmental impact than a single, well defined tread.

A clearly defined staging area with parking and orientation would support the objective of encouraging more pedestrian and bicyclist use of the Vermilion Lakes area from the town.

The linkage between the Fenland Trail and Vermilion Lakes Drive is unmarked and intimidating. It runs steeply up an embankment directly into the high concrete wall separating the Trans-Canada Highway from the Vermilion Lakes Drive. A minor realignment would provide a far better introduction to the Vermilion Lakes area.

OBJECTIVE

To enhance longer distance bicycling and day hiking opportunities in the vicinity of the Town of Banff.

Actions

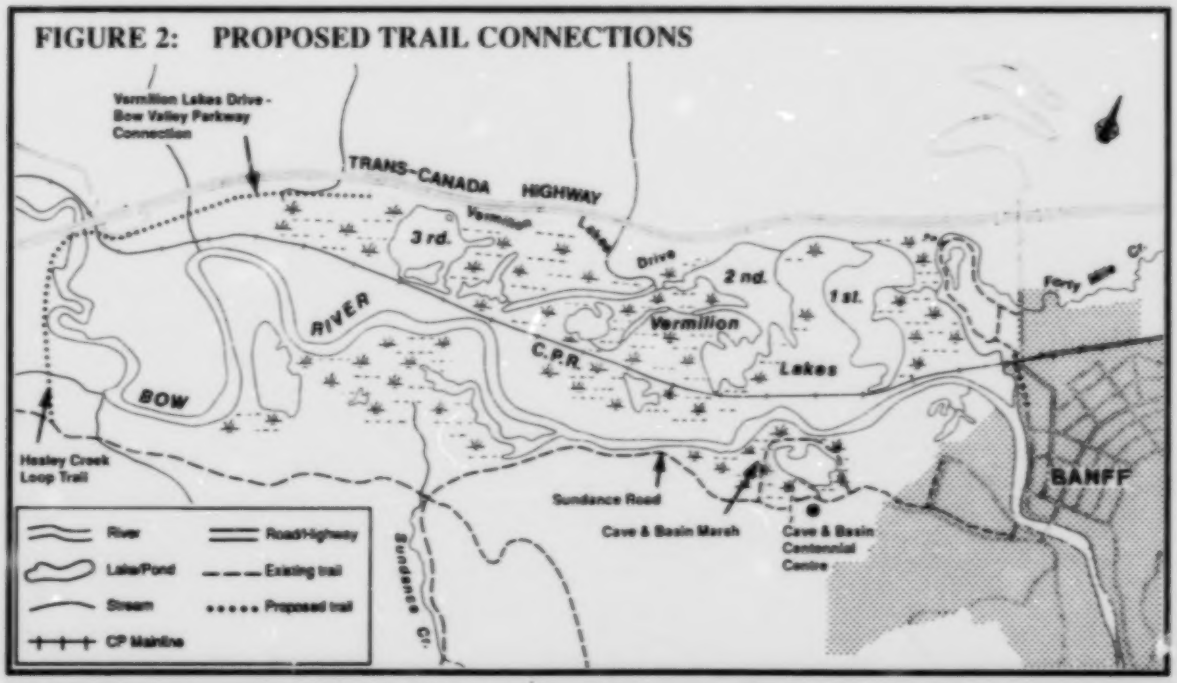
- A hard-surfaced pathway, primarily for touring bicyclists, will be developed to link Vermilion Lakes Drive to the Bow Valley Parkway (see Figure 2).
- A trail connection will be developed between the Vermilion Lakes Drive and the Healy Creek trail/Sundance road, subject to an environmental assessment (see Figure 2).

Discussion

The short portion of highway between the end of the Vermilion Lakes Drive and the Bow Valley Parkway is the only remaining section of the Trans-Canada Highway that must be travelled by bicyclists between Banff and Lake Louise. This section of the highway is dangerous for bicyclists due to the presence of jersey barriers and high speed traffic, and is a very unpleasant bicycling experience. The Bow Valley Parkway is a popular route for local bicyclists and others bicycling between Banff and Lake Louise, as well as being part of the renowned Banff-Jasper route. At the present time, bicyclists have no choice but to use the highway or travel off-trail through the wildlife underpass. The wildlife underpass is currently receiving a notable amount of bicycle traffic because there is no formal trail connection. The preferred route for the bicycle path begins near the end of the old road terminus, passing as far as possible below the wildlife underpass, travels along benchlands south of the Trans-Canada Highway and links up with the Bow Valley Parkway/Trans-Canada Highway interchange.

Hiking and pleasure bicycling opportunities in the Banff townsite region currently consist of a few dead-end trails, where the user is obliged to return on the same route. Loops are known to be preferred over this type of trail. Linking the Vermilion Lakes Drive to the Healy Creek trail would provide a 16.5 km loop returning via Sundance Canyon and the Cave and Basin. Once the Vermilion Lakes Drive - Bow Valley Parkway connection is complete, the remaining link would require approximately 2 km of trail development. The loop would offer a unique wetland/montane forest experience over relatively easy terrain. It would appeal to the numerous resident and visitor mountain bicyclists and joggers, as well as those

FIGURE 2: PROPOSED TRAIL CONNECTIONS



seeking a gentle, longer distance day hiking opportunity leaving directly from the Town of Banff. Detailed route location, archaeological and environmental concerns require further investigation, particularly with regards to crossing the Bow River.

OBJECTIVE

To provide barrier-free access to designated area facilities.

Action

- Barrier-free access for disabled persons will be provided to the toilet facility as well as all roadside interpretation displays, viewpoints and boardwalks..

Discussion

Providing barrier-free access to some facilities, such as the floating docks and trails, is difficult due to the steepness of the banks along the lakes and the limited terrain suitable for development. Disabled visitors will be able to obtain a good overview of the wetlands from the roadside interpretive displays, viewpoints and boardwalks. A wetlands boardwalk trail which is accessible to disabled visitors is also provided at the Cave and Basin Marsh.

OBJECTIVE

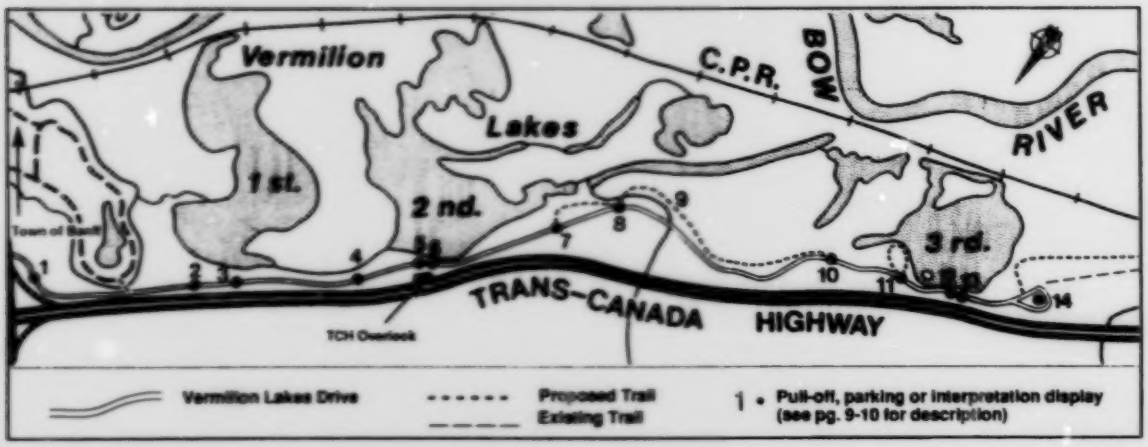
To redistribute, formalize and improve pull-offs, viewpoints and parking areas along Vermilion Lakes Drive so that they better meet the needs of users, take advantage of interpretation opportunities, suit the characteristics of the site and minimize environmental impacts.

Actions

- The proposed locations of pull-offs, viewpoints and parking areas are shown in Figure 3. Actions to be taken at each of the locations are shown in Figure 3 are listed below. Final facility locations are subject to environmental and archaeological review.

1. A small (1-3 vehicle) pull-off at the beginning of the road, close to the town access road, with orientation to the area.
2. Potential interpretation pull-off/viewing platform and spotting scope at site of present "Winterkill" sign.
3. First Lake dock - provide deck at road level with benches, interpretation and spotting scope(s), and retain small floating dock.
4. Pull-off/parking near entrance to Second Lake with toilet building.
5. Second Lake dock - same as First Lake dock.

FIGURE 3: PROPOSED FACILITIES ON VERMILION LAKES DRIVE



6. Pull-off/parking at site of Second Lake sign. Replace existing sign with interpretation media.
7. Pull-off/parking/trail orientation at Beaver Ponds. Beginning of interpretive trail/ boardwalk. Rehabilitate highway side of road to minimize evidence of drainage ditching and old road.
8. Parking at interpretation trail terminus, 0.35 km from trailhead.
9. Continue trail through forest to a location east of site # 11.
10. Parking at final trail terminus.
11. Pull-off/parking at current Lakes Grow Old sign. Better define parking. Potential interpretive trail/boardwalk/viewing platform leading to channel entering Third Lake.
12. Pull-out/parking at Third Lake sign. Replace current sign with interpretation media.
13. Third Lake dock - same as First and Second Lake docks.
14. Better define parking and turnaround at end of road and provide orientation to trails beyond. Interpretation opportunity.

Discussion

Pull-offs and viewpoints along Vermilion Lakes Drive have generally developed in an ad hoc manner, wherever there were viewing opportunities and enough space for parking. Because space is so limited, these generally remain the best opportunities for pull-offs. Formalizing and upgrading, as proposed, will alleviate environmental concerns through better definition of parking areas and take better advantage of interpretation opportunities (see also Section 3.4 - Communication Services).

OBJECTIVES

To separate pedestrians and bicyclists from motorists to the greatest extent possible.

To provide formalized, environmentally acceptable pedestrian access to the lakeshore environment.

Actions

- A trail/boardwalk will be constructed leading along the lakeshore from the beaver ponds (Figure 3) with a mid-point access back to the road at 0.35 km. The first portion of the trail/ boardwalk will have interpretive media.
- Docks will be upgraded to provide closer contact with the wetlands environment, interpretation, relaxation and viewing opportunities (see above).
- Where feasible, parking will be provided within viewing distance, but not directly at, popular relaxation areas such as docks.
- A boardwalk/viewing platform will be developed at the east end of the Third Lake (see above).
- A minor realignment of the Fenland Trail-Vermilion Lakes Drive connection will occur (see above).
- The informal trail connection between the current and former road terminus will be formalized, as an alternative to the old roadbed for hikers.

Discussion

Opportunities are limited due to the proximity of the road to the lakes, the saturated soils along the lakeshore and several highly sensitive areas for wildlife. The above proposals take advantage of existing opportunities without compromising the visual integrity of the area or environmental protection objectives.

The proposed trails and boardwalks are generally hidden from the road, provide interesting views and access to natural features, would be relatively easy to construct and address the impacts (shoreline degradation and disturbance of wildlife) caused by random walking that occurs at the present time.

OBJECTIVE

To incorporate a response to fluctuating water levels and ecological succession into facility design.

Action

- Proposed facilities and communications media will be developed in a manner which makes them adaptable to changing water levels (e.g. floating docks, boardwalk trail sections, changeable interpretation panels).

OBJECTIVE

To provide visitor facilities which are low-key in nature and present a unifying area symbol and design motif.

Actions

- A consistent design motif, which is sensitive to the open wetland environment, will be developed and used for all man-made facilities. A Vermilion Lakes "symbol" will be developed for use on all directional signs, orientation, information and interpretation media.
- Man-made facilities should blend in with, rather than dominate the natural environment in this area. As a guideline, facilities must not be readily visible from the Trans-Canada Highway Overlook or the Mt. Norquay Road.

3.4 Communication Services

OBJECTIVE

To increase awareness among town residents and visitors of opportunities for use and enjoyment of the Vermilion Lakes area by pedestrians and bicyclists.

Themes and Messages

- The Vermilion Lakes area has excellent year round opportunities for a number of recreational opportunities in a highly scenic and relatively untouched natural setting close to the Town of Banff. The area is a relaxing location for walking, jogging, bicycling, nature viewing and other relaxation activities. An emphasis will be placed on providing users with realistic expectations of opportunities in the area.

Actions

- Modifications to the "Drives and Hikes" brochure will be completed following area redevelopment. The description of the Vermilion Lakes area will be modified to reflect the area's market position, the emphasis on pedestrians and bicyclists, and the redeveloped facilities.
- Information Centre staff will be directed to promote the area as a place for quiet relaxation, recreation and appreciation of the wetlands. The same image will be promoted through other off-site media such as the Mountain Guide, Cable television and Information Centre A/V programs.

Discussion

Realistic expectations are the key to visitor satisfaction. Off-site information sources can do much to provide such expectations. The potential audience for awareness messages is very large (the town's population is expected to exceed 10,000 residents in the near future and there are approximately 3.5 million annual visitors to the town).

OBJECTIVES

To improve orientation to the Vermilion Lakes area, particularly for pedestrians andbicyclists.

To provide a sense of welcome for users entering the area.

Themes and Messages

- Orientation for motorists will include how to get to the area from the Trans-Canada Highway, Mount Norquay overpass and from the town. The area symbol (see previous section) will be used on highway signs to present a consistent image of the area to motorists.
- Orientation for trail users will clearly and concisely identify distances to the area, trail linkages, the users' location and significant trail junctions.
- Upon entering the area, a sense of welcome and basic orientation will be provided, including an indication of the type of experience provided. Pedestrians and bicyclists will be informed of trail linkages and distances. Motorists will be informed that Vermilion Lakes Drive is a slow speed, dead end road which they share with pedestrians and bicyclists. Public safety messages and important regulations will also be communicated.

Actions

- Simple continuity ("you are here") maps will be placed at all trailheads and junctions between the Town of Banff and the Vermilion Lakes.
- Simple, low-key orientation signs for motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists will be placed at the beginning of Vermilion Lakes Drive.

Discussion

Orientation will be aimed at encouraging a sense of discovery and exploration, rather than leading visitors by the hand through the area. Signs at the beginning of Vermilion Lakes Drive will be kept to a minimum, will be unobtrusive and consistent with the design motif to be developed for the area. Official highway signs (e.g. posted speed signs) will be exempt from the latter requirement.

OBJECTIVE

To support the protection of heritage resources and natural processes through education.

Themes and Messages

- The basic approach to ecosystem management in national parks is to minimize human disturbance of natural processes. Water level fluctuations and associated ecological succession are a natural feature of the wetland environment.
- The importance and sensitivity of the natural and cultural resources has resulted in the designation of the area as an Environmentally Sensitive Site. It will be afforded the highest level of protection possible, while allowing for relatively high levels of visitor use.
- The area's resources are fragile and visitors can contribute to protection efforts by minimizing their impacts. For example, users will be encouraged to stay on trails and roads, to avoid disturbing nesting waterfowl, not to pick flowers, and not to feed wildlife. The rationale for these regulations/guidelines will be emphasized.
- National parks play a role in the conservation of resources at the local, national, and international level. The drastic reduction in the amount of wetlands and the disturbance of Montane areas outside of national parks increases the importance of protecting the Vermilion Lakes area in a natural state. The resources of Vermilion Lakes are a part of a larger area which has been recognized as having international significance and resulted in designation as a World Heritage Site.
- The Vermilion Lakes are an example of conservation in action. The highway and railway, although necessary national transportation corridors, are continual challenges to resource protection. Wildlife fencing and underpasses are examples of the efforts taken to balance preservation and use.

Action

- The messages described above will be reflected in communications media to be developed for the area (see below and Section 3.3 - Visitor Facilities). Management messages must be communicated sensitively and not overshadow resource messages or compromise visitor enjoyment of the area.

Discussion

The Vermilion Lakes area can serve an important educational role. The lessons learned in this high profile and popular area can be carried into other protected areas. New messages may be added as other resource management actions are implemented.

Presenting the rationale behind park regulations and suggestions for low impact use will promote direct participation and greater support by the public in achieving resource protection objectives.

OBJECTIVES

To enrich visitors' experience by communicating seasonally relevant messages on the area's natural and cultural resources.

To provide opportunities for exploration and interpretation through self-interpreting media.

Themes and Messages

The main Interpretive Theme, which incorporates both natural and cultural resources will be: "Vermilion Wetlands - hospitable oasis in a mountain landscape."

The following are the elements or sub-themes of this main theme:

1. The Vermilion Wetlands contain a rich diversity of year-round habitats and a great diversity and abundance of flora and fauna. The wetlands are highly significant within Banff National Park. High-interest wildlife species which may be found in the area include wolf, moose, elk, sheep, eagle, osprey, muskrat, beaver, grebes, mink, otter, coyote.
2. The diversity of habitats reflects an underlying physical framework of subtle landforms. Controlling physical factors are elevation and climate, subdued topography, presence of water, and open southerly aspect.
3. The lakes originated and continue to evolve from the gradual infilling of a large post-glacial basin. The lakes are now shallow, warm and mature. Small fluctuations in lake levels, either natural or artificial, have dramatic effects on the ecology of the area.
4. Human interest and activity at Vermilion Lakes has been intense and continuous for a period of about 10,500 years. The area's archaeological resources are highly significant with the Four Mountain Parks. The diversity and density of wildlife was an important reason for the human interest and activity. Archaeological research has shown an evolution in the size of animals in this area.
   a) Prehistory. Early man camped and hunted along the shores of Vermilion Lakes. Important archaeological sites have recently been excavated.
   b) History. In the early years of the park, the wetlands were used for agriculture, recreation and sightseeing.
   c) Today, interest in the lakes continues, particularly for recreation, sightseeing and nature appreciation

Actions

- The sense of exploration and discovery will be accomplished in a controlled manner through the use of upgraded docks and the development of wetlands interpretive trails and boardwalks (see also Section 3.3 - Visitor Facilities). These actions will limit the potential impacts of users on natural and cultural resources.
- Two levels of messages will be communicated:
  a) broad, overview messages at roadside pull-offs and the Trans-Canada Highway overlook; and
  b) more detailed messages in settings with more intimate contact with the wetlands environment, such as the wetlands interpretive trail and boardwalks.
- Five main locations for communication media have been identified:
  a) roadside pull-offs;
  b) decks adjacent to the three docks;
  c) interpretive trails and boardwalks;
  d) Trans-Canada Highway overlook; and
  e) road terminus; and
  f) directional media (roads and trails).
- Guided interpretive hikes will continue to be provided in the area.
- Some of the media panels will be changeable, in the interests of providing seasonally relevant messages and information.
- A detailed Communications Plan will be developed for the Vermilion Lakes area to specify locations for presenting the communications messages outlined in this Area Plan, as well as media design.

Discussion

The role of communications is to enrich an already pleasant park experience. Media will be used to enhance, rather than dominate, the Vermilion Lakes experience. The media design will be low key in order to minimize the visual impact of development in the area. Except for docks and some roadside media, all facilities will be visually unobtrusive. Orientation media should build a sense of anticipation and discovery.

The media at the Trans-Canada Highway overlook will be designed so that use of the overlook does not conflict with through traffic on the highway.

4.0 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Implementation of this Area Plan will cover a four year period and is to be considered a single program. A list of the capital and O&M activities associated with each year of theproposed implementation schedule is presented below, along with the responsible sub-activities.

PROJECT	RESPONSIBILITY
YEAR 1	
Ecological study (contract)	Resource Conservation
Communications media development -includes message locations, text writing, media design and area symbol)	Interpretation (Park and W.R.O.) / Visitor Services
Site investigations of trails/boardwalks	Architecture & Engineering / Interpretation / Visitor Services
Design pull-offs, parking	Architecture & Engineering / Visitor Services / Interpretation
Site-specific EARP assessments of plan proposals	Resource Conservation
Archaeology research	Archaeological Research
YEAR 2	
Repair road surface and define parking/pull-offs	Architecture & Engineering / General works
Construct trailhead at end of Bow Avenue	Visitor Services
Construct toilet building (off the shelf design)	Visitor Services / Architecture & Engineering
Final design/production artwork for communications media	Interpretation (Park and W.R.O.)
Upgrade docks and immediate area including support structures for media	Interpretation / Visitor Services/Architecture & Engineering
Design of trails/boardwalks	Architecture & Engineering / Visitor Services / Interpretation
Archaeological research (continued)	Archaeological research

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

PROJECT	RESPONSIBILITY
YEAR 3	
Develop wetlands resource management strategy	Resource Conservation
Construct trails / boardwalks, including support structures for media	
• Bow River path to Fenland trail	Visitor Services/Architecture & Engineering
• Fenland taril - Vermilion Lakes Drive	Visitor Services/Architecture & Engineering
• Vermilion Lakes Drive to Bow Valley Parkway (bikepath)	Visitor Services/Architecture & Engineering
• Healy Creek loop connection	Visitor Services/Architecture & Engineering
• Beaver Pond interpretive trail & forest path	Interpretation/Architecture & Engineering
• Third Lake Boardwalk	Interpretation/Architecture & Engineering
• Formalize trail at end of Vermilion Lakes Drive	Visitor Services/Architecture & Engineering
Fabricate communications media	Interpretation (Park and W.R.O.)/Visitor Services
YEAR 4	
Install media	
• orientation signs (trails and road)	Visitor Services / Interpretation
• vehicle restrictions, speeds, etc.	General Works
• interpretation media	Interpretation